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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard
"~~~~~"

"Saying it like it is!"

Well, it's been one of those weeks again. Typical work-related issues that cause that inevitable level of stress. I guess you just can't get away from it entirely. Whatever happened to those days of just "doing one's job" and enjoying it? By the time you read this week's issue, I'll have found some form of release. I'll have played a round of golf, and know the faces I imagined on each golf ball that I hit!

Enjoyably, the anti-spam movement continues to build up speed. Realistically, I realize that getting rid of spam totally is highly unlikely. Like anything else in this world, as we find ways to stop it, there will be ways found to get around those barriers. Still, it's a start.

I'm hoping to get some outdoor work going this weekend. It looks like the weather is supposed to improve, with warmer temperatures. Time to get some garden work done and get some flowers in. I also lost some shrubbery over this past harsh winter, so some replacements are in order. And, we're still working on designs for the kitchen improvements. Busy, busy!

Until next time...

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Atari800MacX Version 1.4 Released

Version 1.4 of Atari800MacX has been released. It has several bug fixes in it (the Emulator state save now works with all cartridges). Most of the enhancements relate to Gamepad controls, and some of the bug fixes are in this area as well. See <http://members.cox.net/atarimac> for full details and download.

Manga Puzzle Released

The Coolest Paradise released a new game for Atari STE/Steem.

It also works on STf and Falcon, but you should avoid to go into 'infos' menu... A stf and Falcon 100% bug-free version will be done if some people is interested in it.

<http://www.chez.com/stalive/>

AtariAge Magazine Archive

AtariAge is pleased to announce the addition of a Magazine Archive section to the site. High-quality scans of Atari Age Magazine, the Activision Newsletter, Numb Thumb News, Atarian Magazine and the Activision Fun Club News (their UK newsletter) are now online, with more magazines arriving in the future. In addition to making these magazines available for easy browsing online, they are also available for downloading so you can view them at your own leisure. These magazines are a fascinating insight into Atari history, and a must read for any Atari fans!

<http://www.atariage.com/magazines/>

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. My intro to this column is going to be quite short this week. I'm just about talked-out right now, but I have one piece of personal news I figured I'd share with you...

I haven't had a cigarette in 13 weeks now. I spent a couple of days with my wife in the doctor's office and in the hospital emergency room because she had a couple of acute asthma attacks. She's not asthmatic, but she does, on occasion, have these attacks.

The week after she recovered (it was the week of Valentine's Day) I decided that we should both quit smoking. We smoke about the same amount, and have done so for about the same amount of time. I started using nicotine patches on Valentine's Day night. SHE did not. She was on medication and didn't want to use the nicotine patches for fear of a reaction. She started using the nicotine patch two weeks after I did.

We're both still cigarette free after 13 weeks. She has had a few setbacks... I haven't.

Even though I'm now finished with the nicotine patches, I still feel cravings at least daily. I may not have had a cigarette in 13 weeks, but I've WANTED one every day since I quit.

What amazes me is that I really didn't want to quit (and even now, I

don't say that I've QUIT smoking, only that I've stopped). I always thought that you had to really want to quit to be successful. Well, I was wrong. I didn't want to quit and yet I haven't had a cigarette in more than three months. I'm one of those odd people who actually liked cigarettes right from the very first one. I can remember back to when I was very young and visiting my grandparents. They both smoked and, when they'd light up, all the other kids would make faces and clear out to another room. But I'd walk right into the cloud of smoke. Yeah, I know... I'm strange. What can I tell ya?

In any event, I'm cigarette-free. I'll never be one of those PITA ex-smokers who are always in your face about it, but I WILL say this: If I can do it, anyone can.

I know that this really doesn't have anything to do with Atari computers, but I thought there might be a person or two out there who might be interested.

Well, let's get on with the news, hints, tips, and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Ben Smith asks about using an Atari with PayPal:

"Is it possible to do PayPal on an Atari ST with a Web Browser like CAB? Or maybe with newer Atari Web Browsers?"

Martin Tarenskeen tells Ben:

"I have used PayPal using CAB. But I think you'll need MiNTnet and the CAB.OVL for MiNTnet that supports SSL. On the Atari Platform SSL is only supported with MiNTnet (and possibly MagicNet, maybe a MagiC user can confirm this? I don't know a thing about Magic)."

Mark Duckworth adds:

" [I'm] Testing as we speak.

Based on what I can tell, the SSL ovl will need work to work under MagiCNet.

In order to use mintnet, cab-ssl.ovl and use the paypal website effectively, I would recommend a TT or Falcon with 16 megs of ram and easymint. An ST would probably do fine too, as long as it had more RAM. MiNT is memory hungry, and rightfully so... it does more."

Jason Harmon asks about bypassing the AUTO folder:

"I have an Atari 1040STfm, with a MegaFile 60. I recently installed MiNT and XaAES. Unfortunately, the system reboots after it tries to load XaAES.

Does anyone know how to bypass the Auto folder so I can remove it from the folder?"

Michael Pointier tells Jason:

"An alternate solution that work on all systems is to get a "boot floppy" with a hd driver on it (ex: AHDI.PRG). Put the floppy in the

drive, and boot while pressing the ALTERNATE key. It will force the st to forget about hard drive, and you will get access to the gem desktop, run the driver from the floppy, add an icon for C: (top right menu "add icons"), and modify what you want on the hard drive."

Jason replies:

"Strange... The ALTERNATE key made no difference, but I was able to hit CTRL-C during the boot process after the HD drivers loaded but before MiNT loaded, and get into the desktop.

Is the ALT key thing something that was added after TOS 1.0?"

Grzegorz Pawlik tells Jason:

"As far as I know it depends on the hard disk driver, not on the TOS version. I use HUSHI on my 520ST with TOS 1.0 (1985) and when I hold Alt key it boots from the floppy. This method also works with HDDriver. Don't know about AHDI, though.

When you press (and hold it, for quite a long time...) the ALT key during bootup, the hard disk driver should not load at all, so you would not have access to your hard disk (unless you start the driver manually later on).

When you press (*not* hold!!) "A" key during bootup, the hard disk driver should load, but the system should boot from A device, that is, floppy disk. This would give you the access to your hard drive, but without starting all those AUTO programs from the drive C. In the same way you may choose different partitions to boot from (D, E... etc, if you have them) so that you may keep different systems on your hard drive - MagiC on C, TOS on D, MiNT on E - and then you could *always* boot in TOS or MagiC, in case there were something wrong with MiNT.

BTW from what I remember from some MiNT 1.12 doc files it is not recommended to use MiNT with TOS 1.0...? I might be wrong, though, maybe someone will correct it. If you have TOS 1.0, why not install MagiC?"

Edward Baiz adds:

"I usually just boot from a floppy and get to the desktop. Then I run the hard drive driver program from the floppy, install drive 'C' the boot partition and then adjust the auto folder from there."

Maurits van de Kamp asks about drivers for his video card:

"I have a nova/vme card in my TT and I am wondering if there's a site where I can download the latest (and probably last) [;)] version of the drivers. I'm having some trouble with the driver on the disk I got with it.

In case I can't find any other drivers, here's my problem, maybe knows a solution...:) Papyrus can't figure out the correct font size for vector fonts on the screen. I can tell Papyrus to use "automatic" settings (fonts will appear 1 millimeter large), or to get it from the graphics driver (same result), or use a fixed setting (fonts will be slightly too large, which will still mess up the format when printing).

According to Rom Logicware, getting a newer Nova driver will solve this

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - A Handheld PlayStation Device!
    " """""""""""""""""""""""" E3 News! New Lara Croft Coming!
                                     Console Price Cuts! Matrix!
                                     And much more!
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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News    -   The Latest Gaming News!
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Sony to Launch Handheld PlayStation Game Device

Sony Corp on Tuesday announced it would launch a new handheld PlayStation gaming device to be available by the end of next year.

The announcement, which took industry watchers by surprise, puts Nintendo Co. Ltd. and its Game Boy handheld platform directly in the sights of Sony, just as in 1995 when Sony first ventured into the game console business.

Sony executives also announced a number of new exclusive games for the PlayStation 2 and cemented an online sports game partnership with leading independent game publisher Electronic Arts Inc as it aims to keep its lead over both Microsoft Corp's Xbox and Nintendo's lagging GameCube.

Sony's upcoming PSP device, scheduled for release in the fourth quarter of 2004, will feature a color screen, computing power equal to the original best-selling PlayStation and a new high-capacity optical disc created especially for it, the company told reporters and analysts at a news conference.

"To celebrate the tenth anniversary of the PlayStation's launch, we're bringing out a special new baby for the family. We will be launching a new handheld entertainment platform," said Ken Kutaragi, president and chief executive of Sony Computer Entertainment and the creator the PlayStation.

Sony said the PSP would also feature a 4.5-inch LCD screen, Memory Stick expansion slots.

Nintendo's GameCube console has struggled badly since its late-2001 launch, missing sales targets in the last fiscal year by nearly 50 percent. It is in third place in the console market behind Sony's market-leading PlayStation 2 and the Xbox.

Sony's surprise announcement came on the second day of the Electronic Entertainment Expo, or E3, the major trade show for the video game industry.

Sony also unveiled an exclusive deal with No. 1 publisher Electronic Arts Inc. for online sports games.

EA, which dominates the sports market with games like "Madden NFL," has balked at the financial terms of Microsoft's Xbox Live online service and also the direct control it would give Microsoft over some of EA's most-loyal customers.

To grow its competing online game audience, Sony said it would effectively give away the necessary online adapter with new sales of the PS2 for the

same \$199 price.

Sony Computer Entertainment of America President Kaz Hirai said Sony would also introduce some redesigns to the PS2 hardware, allowing it to play back home-made DVDs among other things.

He also said Sony would release a hard disk drive for the PS2 in the first quarter of 2004 in North America to coincide with the release of the online-only game "Final Fantasy XI."

One of the most striking features of Sony's presentation was the EyeToy, a new \$39 USB device that will be released in October and enables players to control PS2 games with hand and body motions, project their own images on the screen and conduct video chat sessions online.

In another coup, Sony said Take-Two Interactive Software Inc. has agreed to make the next game in the "Grand Theft Auto" series exclusive to PS2. The previous two "GTA" titles were both PS2 exclusives and have together sold more than 17 million units worldwide.

Video Game Industry Prepares for LA Extravaganza

Cram 65,000 people into a convention center, add the sounds of aliens being shot and race cars being crashed at rock-and-roll volumes, then sprinkle in a few women dressed in costumes just an inch or two this side of indecency.

What you get is E3, the Electronic Entertainment Expo, the video game industry's annual convention that starts this week in Los Angeles and represents the favored forum for deal-making and promotion in a business expected to generate \$30 billion in sales in 2003.

"I think it's going to be a good shot in the arm for the business," Jeff Lapin, the chief executive of games publisher Take-Two Interactive Software Inc., told Reuters.

The show floor opens Wednesday, but the festivities kick off Monday night when Microsoft Corp. holds a press conference at which it is expected to announce upgrades to its Xbox Live online gaming service.

The next day, Sony Corp. and Nintendo Co. Ltd. will have back-to-back events to showcase the latest games for their consoles, the PlayStation 2 and GameCube. The afternoon will feature new games from Konami Corp. and the latest on Nokia's N-Gage phone/game device.

The crush will start in earnest on Wednesday, as the show floor opens and attendees rush in to get hands-on time with the latest games, some of which are on the verge of release and some of which will not see the light of retail shelves for months.

Special pavilions and rooms dedicated to the British, Korean, Australian, Canadian and Hong Kong games industries have been set up so companies there can try to take a piece of a global market dominated by the United States and Japan.

Analysts agree that E3 is a catalyst for game stocks and the time to buy is now.

"If there is a trading rule on how to play the videogame stocks surrounding E3, recent history says that buying them during the show is the most consistent way to make money," RBC Capital Markets analyst Stewart Halpern said in a note.

Halpern's analysis showed that in 2000 through 2002, the only constant in terms of price moves is that the stocks go up an average of 5.4 percent during the show, while no pattern holds true in the days before and after the event.

One of those game publishers, Electronic Arts Inc., is expected to shine during the show.

"They have so many popular licenses ... they kind of overshadow everybody else," Dan Hsu, the editor of games magazine Electronic Gaming Monthly, told Reuters.

"Nintendo is probably the one that has the most to lose right now," Hsu said, referring to the company's recent sales struggles for the GameCube console and a lack of buzz about its games lineup before the show.

Among the games drawing the biggest buzz before the show are the PC shooters "Doom III" and "Half-Life 2," Sony's racing game "Gran Turismo 4" and Microsoft's action title "Halo 2."

E3 is also big business for the city of Los Angeles, generating at least \$12 million in revenue. On Friday shops throughout downtown Los Angeles had signs in their windows welcoming the convention.

Video Game Expo to Focus on Proven Hits

More of the same, only better - that's the paradoxical hype emerging this week as the video game industry's three consoles embark on a third season of competition.

The focus at this year's E3 - Electronic Entertainment Expo - is recruiting new players with updated versions of proven hits for Sony's PlayStation2, Microsoft's Xbox and Nintendo's GameCube.

"If you look at the best-seller lists, look at what sells, look at the competitive environment we're in, look at the cost of development, look at the risk-reward profile, companies are not taking a huge number of chances," said Douglas Lowenstein, president of the Interactive Digital Software Association, the industry trade group that hosts E3.

The trend now is to improve established genres - fighting games, sports games, driving simulations, he said.

Consoles typically have about five years of shelf life before the next generation of consoles overtakes them, said Richard Ow, an industry analyst for the NPD Group. "Is there still expansion left for these particular machines? Absolutely," he said.

Among the new-and-improved, same-as-they-ever-were titles hitting the market in the coming year is a remake of the 1998 espionage battle game "Metal Gear Solid" in the intense graphic style of 2001's "Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty." The new game, subtitled "The Twin Snakes," will

be available on GameCube.

At the show, which runs Wednesday to Friday at the Los Angeles Convention Center, Xbox is presenting the first-person shooter, "Halo 2," a sequel to the console's best-selling game, updated with online capabilities so players can work as teams.

"Grand Turismo 4," the latest in Sony's exalted car-race series, promises "perfected racing physics," a wider variety of vehicles and an online option.

The game will initially be released for PlayStation2, as will Eidos' latest Lara Croft adventure. "Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness" promises darker storytelling, with the curvy heroine a murder suspect.

Among PC sequels offering a multiplayer Internet option will be "Uru: Ages Beyond Myst," which follows up on the pioneering fantasy world puzzle that was "Myst."

Retreads and all, the video game industry keeps growing, reaching \$11.7 billion in sales in 2002. The bulk were consoles, console games and accessories. PC games accounted for about \$1.4 billion of that amount.

Among consoles, PlayStation2 remains the industry leader by far, the Xbox has developed a distant but steady second-place following and GameCube trails with a niche following among younger children.

Microsoft and Sony were each expected to unveil updates to their online multiplayer gaming offerings this week.

While the Internet market remains slim, it will increase in importance now that the consoles are online, said Steve Koenig, an NPD Group analyst. "If you're releasing a PC game this year that does not support multiplayer online gaming, then you're well behind the curve."

Lowenstein, however, said that Internet gaming remains "a wannabe," having appealed only to a small fraction of current gamers so far.

Fifty-seven percent of the 1,300 new games and related products on show this week at the E3 gathering are console games and attachments, 27 percent are for PCs, 9 percent for handheld gaming systems, 5 percent for use on wireless phones and about 2 percent for Internet gaming, according to an industry group survey.

Back in the deja vu department, Nintendo hopes to expand GameCube's base by highlighting its fusion capabilities with the company's fiercely popular GameBoy Advance portable system.

"Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles," the latest in more than a dozen versions of the fighting, sorcery and puzzle-solving role-playing favorite, will allow players to battle on television through the GameCube system by connecting their handheld GameBoys as controllers, which then feed them secret strategy information the other players can't see.

"Connectivity is a really great way to have a third way of playing that is unique to us only," said Perrin Kaplan, vice president of marketing for Nintendo of America.

She said several other connectivity games will be announced at E3, along with new Nintendo titles from the "Pokemon," "Starfox" and "Mario Kart"

franchises.

As for Sony, it planned to show sequels for PlayStation2 to its buddy comedy adventures "Jak & Daxter" and "Ratchet & Clank" and was also debuting the fighting adventure "Rise to Honor," which features the voice, image and fight moves of Jet Li.

The Jet Li title, as one might imagine, is designed for sequeldom.

'Matrix' Fans Get Bonus Movie as Atari Game Debuts

Game publisher Atari Inc. has a message for fans of the "Matrix" movies: there is a secret sequel out there.

It's locked away inside the biggest-budget video game ever.

Atari on Thursday released "Enter the Matrix," the video game companion to "The Matrix Reloaded" movie opening on the same day.

The \$50 game features a full two hours of new "Matrix" story, including an hour of footage shot on the film's set with some of the film's cast. The Wachowski brothers, who wrote and directed the trilogy of "Matrix" films, also wrote the dialogue and story for the video game.

"They treated this like the third movie," said David Perry, the president of Shiny Entertainment, the Atari unit that developed the game for all console platforms and the PC, in an interview at the video game industry's Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) in Los Angeles.

Atari Chief Executive Bruno Bonnell told Reuters at E3 that the game cost more than \$30 million, making it the most expensive game ever and one backed by the largest launch.

Atari, which recently changed its name from Infogrames, is betting big on the "Matrix," shipping 4 million units to retail stores around the world.

The game was not released to media until Thursday because of the secret film footage, so reviews remain scarce. Gaming magazines and Web sites that previewed the unfinished version have shown only restrained enthusiasm for the game, which features heavy action and combat.

"I'm sure we're going to have mixed reviews," Bonnell said.

Since the April 18 announcement that the game was finished and ready to ship to retail, Atari's stock has been on a run, gaining nearly 175 percent.

But Bonnell said that even if the game fails to meet expectations, it was only forecast to make up 15 percent to 17 percent of Atari's fiscal-year revenue.

"Matrix is not saving anybody," he said. "If worse comes to worst it's not going to put the company under."

Work has already begun on the next game, set for the 2004 holiday season, and Atari is also working on games based on the "Terminator" and "Mission: Impossible" movie franchises.

"Our clear intention is to set the standard (for) Hollywood-based games," Bonnell said.

Microsoft Launching New Titles for Xbox

Microsoft Corp. plans to release 200 new sports, action-adventure and other video games this year for its Xbox video-game console and Xbox Live online gaming service.

Also on Monday, Microsoft brushed aside the news that the industry's top video game maker - Electronic Arts - is developing online games for the Xbox's chief rival, Sony's PlayStation 2 - while continuing to ignore Microsoft's online platform.

The Redmond, Wash.-based software giant announced the new games at E3 - Electronic Entertainment Expo - in Los Angeles.

The company also plans to release new software to turn the Xbox system into a broader entertainment device, capable of showing digital pictures, storing and playing digital music and even doubling as a karaoke machine,

Microsoft's new offerings include games to bring in new players as well as satisfy its current base of Xbox users, said Robbie Bach, senior vice president of Microsoft's Home and Entertainment Division and chief Xbox officer.

The lineup also includes about 30 new games for Xbox Live, Bach said. The company expects to have a total of 100 titles for Xbox Live by mid-May 2004. The service, launched in November, has about 500,000 subscribers around the world, Bach said.

In addition, Microsoft unveiled its XSN Sports lineup, in which Xbox Live players can create their own leagues, teams and tournaments. It also announced new features, such as allowing gamers to receive invitations to join games on wireless phones and digital devices.

But Microsoft's new offerings will not include online versions of the blockbuster sports games made by Electronic Arts. The Redwood City, Calif.-based developer of the popular Madden NFL and Tiger Woods PGA Tour games plans to debut its online versions only for Sony game machines.

Electronic Arts executives told the Wall Street Journal they decided to exclude Microsoft because the company was demanding too much control over Electronic Arts' games and wasn't willing to pay for their use.

EA is Microsoft's top game publisher, Bach said.

"We'd love to have EA on Xbox Live and continue to work with them," he said. "It's an ongoing conversation, we have a very good relationship with them."

The Music Mixer, a \$39.99 Xbox addition that turns the console into a karaoke machine for example, is an expansion of the Xbox into general entertainment, not just video games, said Bach.

It also reflects Microsoft's strategy of integrating its Xbox into its family of software for the personal computer, said Rob Enderle, an analyst

with Forrester Research.

Bach said Microsoft has no plans to cut prices on the \$199 Xbox, which previously was reduced from \$299.

Eidos Announces Imminent Return of Lara Croft

British-based computer games firm Eidos announced the imminent return of its most famous creation and biggest money-spinner - tomb-raiding Lara Croft.

The next instalment in the adventures of the skimpily-dressed pistol-packing heroine, "Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness", will be released on June 20, Eidos said.

It will hit the streets five days before the second installment in the Lara Croft film franchise, "The Cradle of Life", again starring Angelina Jolie as the intrepid adventurer, is released by Paramount in the United States.

The game has suffered from a series of delays, with Eidos announcing last October that it needed further development and would not be released in time for the lucrative Christmas market.

At the time Eidos said the new game would see Lara "interact" with characters rather than just shooting them.

Eidos, formerly a specialist video technology firm, has been one of the biggest success stories of the computer gaming industry since it released its first games in 1995.

The bulk of its spectacular growth has been based on titles starring Lara Croft. More than 28 million copies of the five existing Tomb Raider games have been sold worldwide since the first was released in 1996.

Sammy Introduces 'Seven Samurai' Video Game

In Akira Kurosawa's "The Seven Samurai," one of the most widely acclaimed films of all time, itinerant swordsmen defend an impoverished village from marauding bandits in feudal Japan.

In the futuristic video game sequel being developed with the blessing of Kurosawa's son, there is also a masterless samurai and six warrior companions - but the parallels seem to screech to a halt there.

The plot revolves around a tribe of mechanical beasts that threaten the future of humanity, a darkening city at the center of the world - not to mention a vanished Holy Child.

Hisao Kurosawa, 57, told Reuters that his biggest concern was ensuring that the game would capture as much as possible of the spirit of the 1954 film directed by his late father.

Japanese entertainment company Sammy Corp. on Wednesday announced plans for

"Seven Samurai 20XX," which is scheduled to be released this fall exclusively on the Sony Corp.'s PlayStation 2 game console.

Sammy, which recently broke off merger plans with games publisher Sega Corp., showed off the game at the Electronic Entertainment Expo, or E3, the biggest trade show for the \$30 billion video game industry.

The game's 100-plus characters in the game were designed by French comics artist Moebius, and Academy Award-winning composer Ryuichi Sakamoto composed the game's opening and closing theme music tracks.

"The idea is for people to have some feeling afterward," Hiroshi Matsumoto, a general manager for research and development at game designer Dimps Corp., told Reuters.

"Seven Samurai" was remade by Hollywood as "The Magnificent Seven."

Game Console Price Cuts Seen in Summer or Later

Major retailers have been waiting and hoping for video game console makers to cut prices this month - just as they did last year, during and right after the industry's biggest trade show.

But now some industry sources and analysts do not expect the next round in the Xbox-PlayStation price war until late summer or even year-end.

That would disappoint U.S. retailers who had expected big price markdowns to be announced this month. Speculation had been strong that next week's E3, the games industry's annual trade show, would bring across-the-board price cuts.

The Electronic Entertainment Expo starts next week in Los Angeles and represents the favored forum for deal-making and promotion in a business expected to generate \$30 billion in sales in 2003.

Last year's E3 saw a \$100 cut to \$199 on Sony Corp.'s PlayStation 2, followed days later by the same cut to \$199 on Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox, and then a \$50 move to \$149 for Nintendo Co. Ltd.'s GameCube.

The cuts spurred a strong boost in retail game software and hardware sales across the board, leading to expectations that another cut was coming.

But one U.S. retail source familiar with the industry pricing situation said this week that the expected dates for price cuts came and went, leaving the next likely window as July or August.

Two European industry sources with regular dealings inside the industry's price and promotion machine pegged the likely new prices at \$149 for the PS2 and Xbox and \$99 for the GameCube, and one said at least one retailer, GameStop Corp., had begun making preparations for a cut. Cuts were seen coming in Europe as well.

"There's a very good chance that prices could come down sometime around the fourth-quarter and this will be pretty bullish for the retailers," said Todd Kuhrt, an analyst at Midwest Research.

Representatives of the major U.S. game retailers - Best Buy Co. Inc.,

Circuit City Stores Inc., Wal-Mart Stores Inc., GameStop Corp. and Electronics Boutique Holdings Corp. - had no immediate comment.

A second U.S. toy retail source also well informed on pricing issues indicated "I am told this is going to happen in the fourth quarter."

Retailers generally need to be in the loop on pricing ahead of the public so that they can begin planning their promotional efforts and building their inventories.

Microsoft has been mum on the pricing subject, while Nintendo has said publicly it would not move unless its hand was forced by a competitor.

Sony Computer Entertainment of America President Kaz Hirai, in an interview with Reuters earlier this week, said Sony was "very comfortable" with their \$199 PS2 price and did not expect a price cut this month.

On Thursday, the chief executive of games publisher Activision Inc., Bobby Kotick, told investors and analysts he expected a mid-year price cut.

While game publishers generally want a price cut, they are more concerned with Sony, in particular, meeting its shipment forecasts. "Whether Sony gets it at \$199, \$179 or \$149, we're indifferent," THQ Chief Executive Brian Farrell told Reuters recently. "All we need is that 10.5 million units."

Microsoft Cuts Xbox Game Console Price

Microsoft Corp. on Wednesday cut the price of the Xbox video game console to \$179.99 in the United States, matching the price cut announced a day earlier by Sony Corp. for the dominant PlayStation 2.

A Microsoft spokeswoman said the near 10 percent price cut from \$199 took effect immediately. Some retailers were already showing the new price on their Web sites.

Sony said it cut the PS2 price from \$199 on Tuesday to clear out inventory ahead of the June launch of a redesigned version, which includes an adapter for networking. That package is expected to sell for \$199.

Both price cuts took industry watchers by surprise, coming as they did at the start of the Electronic Entertainment Expo, the video game industry's annual trade show.

Sony Computer Entertainment of America President Kaz Hirai and Microsoft Chief Xbox Officer Robbie Bach both told Reuters within the last week they saw no need for a price cut.

"We're very comfortable with the way things are selling," Bach said on Monday.

On Wednesday, Hirai told Reuters he thought Microsoft's move had been premature and said Sony still intended to charge \$199 for its new package coming in June.

"I think that ... they may have jumped the gun here," he said.

Satoru Iwata, the president of GameCube manufacturer Nintendo Co. Ltd., played down the possibility of a price cut for its \$149 console, which currently comes with a free game.

"I really don't think there is an urgent necessity to cut the price," Iwata said.

Retailers had been clamoring for a price cut, according to games publishing executives, as the move usually brings a sharp rise in sales. However, most were expecting that any price cut on the consoles would be \$50 rather than \$20.

Many had also assumed that the next round of discounting by the game manufacturers would not happen until the fall in order to provide a lift to sales during the crucial year-end holiday season.

Win a Chance to Get Beaten Up - in a Video Game

The good news: video game fans have a chance to star in an upcoming game release.

The bad news: your digital likeness will be beaten with lead pipes and body-slammed into concrete pool decks.

British video game publisher Eidos on Friday said it has struck a deal with games news company IGN Entertainment Inc. to sponsor a contest in which the winner will appear as a character in the upcoming game 'Backyard Wrestling: Don't Try This at Home.'

The game is set for release this summer on the PlayStation 2 and Xbox game consoles, and the contest, which requires only a name and an e-mail address, is open to anyone age 18 and up.

Eidos said the contest runner-up will receive a lineup of 'Backyard Wrestling' DVDs, in which competitors abuse each other with anything they can find. The Web site for Backyard Wrestling Inc. shows a number of competitors lying on the ground, beaten and bloody.

Separately, Eidos said it had signed a deal with Island Records for an official in-game soundtrack featuring some of the top hard-core rock music acts, including Sum 41, Slayer, and the Insane Clown Posse.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online      -      Online Users Growl & Purr!
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Lure of the Temptress

Lure of the Temptress was Revolution's very first adventure game and work

began on it in 1989, even before Revolution's inception as an actual games development company. From the start our aim was to consider the contemporary adventures of the day and then bring something new to the genre. From this came the Virtual Theatre engine. VT allowed in-game characters to wander around the gameworld indepently of each other, living their own lives and doing their own thing. Another feature allowed the player to give direct orders to Helper characters - in this case Ratpouch - who would then go off to perform the task. These technology concepts were certainly unique, though Revolution were not sure how to develop them further in subsequent games. Nonetheless, the result was a quirky and entertaining adventure game that kicked off Revolution's fondness for characterisation and in-game humour.

Lure of the Temptress was originally released for ST, Amiga and PC.

PC Lure now available for FREE download!

Download English lure.zip 1.3MB

Download French lure_fr.zip 3.3MB

Download German lure_de.zip 3.5MB

*French and German versions have the manual included because the copy protection system is still present in the executable.

Simply unzip to a directory and run the lure.exe

Although Lure of the Temptress is over 10 years old, compatibility is pretty good and you should find it runs ok. If it doesn't, we don't know why.

Important When the game first begins, move the cursor to the menu at the top of the screen and RESTART the game. This bypasses the copy protection system.

Have fun!

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Lawmaker to Present Anti-Spam Bill This Week

A powerful U.S. lawmaker plans to introduce an anti-spam bill this week that is expected to move quickly through Congress but may fall short of what consumer advocates say is needed to stop the plague of unwanted e-mail.

E-mail marketers who lie about their identities or use other deceptive tactics could face fines and up to two years in prison under a bill drafted by Louisiana Republican Rep. Billy Tauzin, the powerful chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee.

But the bill does not try to curb "legitimate" e-mail solicitations at a time when many Internet providers and some government officials say the sheer volume of unwanted spam, rather than its content, is what's causing problems.

Tauzin's effort, which joins at least three other anti-spam bills in Congress, is likely to advance quickly as it has been developed with the House Judiciary Committee. The two committees have clashed previously over how to curb the unwanted e-mail that now accounts for up to 75 percent of all online messages.

"When we introduce the bill, when we go to hearings, when we have markups, it'll all be in lock-step with the Judiciary Committee," Tauzin spokesman Ken Johnson said.

A Judiciary spokesman confirmed that the two committees have been drafting the bill together.

Roughly two-thirds of the unwanted commercial e-mail that clogs users' inboxes contains deceptive information such as false return addresses, misleading subject lines or pitches for miracle cures, work-at-home schemes, or other questionable products, according to a recent analysis by the Federal Trade Commission.

According to a draft obtained by Reuters, Tauzin's bill seeks to cut down on such deceptive spam by requiring e-mail marketers to disclose their online and physical addresses and honor consumer requests to be taken off their mailing lists. Pornographic e-mails would be labeled as such, and marketers would not be allowed to "harvest" e-mail addresses from sources that say they will not resell customer information.

Those who violate these guidelines could face fines of up to \$1.5 million and jail time of up to 2 years. Internet providers, state attorneys general and federal law-enforcement agencies such as the FTC and the Justice Department could go after suspected spammers, but the bill does not allow individual lawsuits or class-action suits.

The bill would also override existing anti-spam state laws, some of which allow individuals to sue.

Tauzin's bill largely echoes the approach favored by online marketers, who fear that an overly broad law could ban e-mail from banks, airlines and other reputable businesses.

Legal expert David Sorkin said the bill could legitimize much of what people now view as spam, leading to an increase in unwanted, if not deceptive, e-mail.

"I think it's misguided and counterproductive," said Sorkin, an associate professor at the John Marshall Law School in Chicago. "I think it will lead to more spam rather than less."

Authorities Arrest 135 in Nationwide Cybercrime Sweep

Attorney General John Ashcroft said Friday 135 people have been charged and more than \$17 million seized in a crackdown on investment swindles,

identity theft and other forms of Internet fraud and abuse.

U.S. law-enforcement officers arrested 50 suspects this week in an effort to combat the fast-growing online crime that now accounts for more than half of all fraud complaints, Ashcroft said.

Those arrested stand accused of a variety of crimes, from setting up fake banking Web sites to collect the account numbers of unsuspecting customers to surreptitiously taping and selling unreleased movies, Ashcroft said.

Many of the cases involved advertising goods or services that did not exist. Defendants allegedly sold computers, video- game consoles, Beanie Babies and other items through e-mail or online auction sites but never delivered them, while others allegedly sold counterfeit software and watches.

One California resident was charged with operating a bogus investment scheme that took in \$60 million from some 15,000 victims worldwide, while a San Diego couple was charged with taking in \$600,000 through a matchmaking service that promised to pair lonely men with Russian or Ukrainian women.

According to charges filed by the Justice Department, some defendants tapped into the customer lists of a California amusement park and the tax rolls of a Pennsylvania city in a bid to take out credit cards in other people's names.

Since Jan. 1, the Justice Department and other federal agencies have uncovered more than 89,000 victims bilked out of some \$176 million, Ashcroft said.

The Internet's borderless nature presents new opportunities to scam artists whose reach would normally be limited and requires law enforcement agencies to work together to catch them, Ashcroft said.

"These cyberswindles and dot-cons present new challenges to law enforcement," he said.

FBI (news - web sites) Director Robert Muller said the federal crime-fighting agency has set up 60 specialized teams around the country to combat online fraud.

Internet fraud complaints have risen steadily over the past several years and now account for more than half of all fraud complaints received by the Federal Trade Commission, FTC Chairman Timothy Muris said.

The effort also involved agents from the Postal Inspection Service, the Secret Service, the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, as well as state and local police.

Officials Escalate Spam Crackdown

In a sweeping crackdown on Internet fraud, state and federal authorities Thursday announced that they have brought 45 cases against Internet scam artists and deceptive spammers.

The campaign marks the fourth in a series of regional sweeps over the past 13 months that teamed an armada of agencies filing more than 150 cases.

Authorities also said they have launched an effort to torpedo one of spammers' most critical tools - "open relays." These are unprotected e-mail servers through which marketers route their messages to conceal their identity and evade junk e-mail filters.

Investigators from 17 agencies identified 1,000 potential open relays in 16 countries and sent letters asking authorities there to shut them down.

In a warning to scammers, Jane Boyle, U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Texas, said at a news conference, "We have the expertise, funding and motivation to go after you. You're not smart enough, and you cannot hide from us."

The latest crackdown involved the Federal Trade Commission, the Securities and Exchange Commission (news - web sites) and the states of Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas, and other authorities.

* Alyon Technologies allegedly used a modem dialing service to disconnect consumers from their own Internet service provider and link them to the scammers' network. By capturing their phone number, the company billed them \$4.99 a minute for videotext, or Web video and information services, that they typically didn't receive or authorize.

* A spam e-mail offer touted work-at-home envelope stuffing. The pitch from Easy Money promised consumers they would earn \$1 for each envelope they stuffed, and as much as \$1,500 a week. Actually, for a \$50 fee, they got instructions to market a deceptive credit-repair manual, the FTC says.

* College Funding Center allegedly told college-bound students and their parents that it would obtain all their college funding for \$895.

Instead, the Web-based operation supplied them scholarship information they could have gotten free.

* Another Web work-at-home scheme, Instant Internet Empires, promised buyers they could make \$115,000 a year with their product. But for \$47.77, they simply got the right to reproduce the company's advertising Web site and try to resell it to others, the FTC says.

* Click for Mail claimed consumers who coughed up \$49.95 were guaranteed a "100% unsecured" Visa or MasterCard credit card with a credit limit up to \$5,000.

Actually, consumers got access to a Web page with hyperlinks to sites of credit card issuers - a list freely available to Web surfers, the FTC says.

US Seeks to Expand Spam Crackdown to 59 Countries

US authorities called on organizations in 59 countries to close loopholes in cyberspace that allow people to hide their identities in sending "spam," or unsolicited e-mail.

The Federal Trade Commission and other agencies said they were asking for the closing of so-called "open relays" that allow people "to avoid detection by spam filters and law enforcers," according to an FTC statement.

Open relays allow third parties to route their e-mail through servers of other organizations, disguising the real origin of the e-mail.

US regulators identified 1,000 potential open relays, 90 percent of which were in 16 countries: the United States, China, South Korea, Japan, Italy, Poland, Brazil, Germany, Taiwan, Mexico, Britain, Chile, France, Argentina, India, Spain and Canada.

An FTC spokeswoman said the open relays may exist on servers operated by governments, schools, businesses or any organization with a server, or central computer.

The spokeswoman said many of the open relays are on older servers with weaker security settings and may not be intentionally left open.

The agencies drafted a letter which was translated into 11 languages and signed by 14 US and international agencies, urging the organizations to close their open relays to help reduce spam.

The announcement was made at the same time the authorities announced 45 criminal and civil law enforcement actions against Internet "scammers and deceptive spammers."

"Today's Internet is not a lawless environment," said Howard Beales, director of consumer protection for the FTC.

The charges relate to auction fraud, illegal sale of controlled substances, get-rich-quick scams, illegal advance-fee credit card offers, and identity theft.

Agencies involved in the "NetForce" crackdown include the US Postal Inspection Service, Securities and Exchange Commission and dozens of state agencies.

The effort is also coordinated with regulators in Australia, Canada, Japan and Chile, the FTC said.

13 States Sue Company Over Pop-Up Windows

Wisconsin and 12 other states are suing an Internet firm that allegedly billed people who tried to close pop-up windows for pornographic Web sites, the state's attorney general said Thursday.

The suits, filed in conjunction with the Federal Trade Commission, alleges New Jersey-based Alyon Technologies violated advertising and telecommunications laws.

Wisconsin's lawsuit claims Alyon connected Internet users to the company's toll phone number when they tried to close Alyon's pop-up windows advertising porn sites.

The toll number charges \$5 a minute, Attorney General Peg Lautenschlager said, resulting in bills ranging from \$14 to more than \$1,000.

"The way this organization has allegedly been doing business is illegal, irresponsible and an outrageous misuse of Internet technology," she said.

Other states that have sued are California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri, New Jersey, Ohio, North Carolina, Nebraska, Texas and West Virginia.

Alyon officials said Thursday that they alerted the FTC to procedures the states are questioning and have been working with state lawmakers to make sure its practices comply with federal and state laws.

"Given our willingness and effort to work to resolve the consumer issues, we are stunned by the FTC's decision to initiate this unwarranted action," Alyon president Stephane Touboul said in a statement.

Alleged eBay Scammer Pleads No Contest

A man who sold high-end computers, laptops and other equipment on eBay Inc.'s online auction site pleaded no contest to allegations of fraud totaling \$453,000.

Chris Chong Kim, 28, of Los Angeles entered the plea Friday to one count of grand theft and agreed to a waiver that will allow the court to consider restitution for victims.

He is accused of defrauding 26 customers of sums ranging from nearly \$2,000 to \$6,000. The criminal complaint alleged victims, eBay and Bank of America lost a total of \$453,000.

Kim's eBay business, Calvin's Auctions, allegedly stopped shipping equipment in April 2002 but its sales continued. The Southern California High Tech Task Force investigated after complaints were lodged with the FBI's Internet Fraud Complaint Center. Calvin's Auctions was shut down in July 2002, according to Deputy District Attorney Jonathan Fairtlough.

Kim has agreed to pay \$100,000 in restitution at his June 6 sentencing. He also faces three years in state prison, but Fairtlough said he will be sent to a restitution center to serve his time so he can earn money to pay his victims.

NY Attorney General Says 'Buffalo Spammer' Arrested

The man known as the "Buffalo Spammer," who has allegedly sent 825 million unwanted e-mails, has been arrested and arraigned, New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer said on Wednesday.

Howard Carmack, a 36-year-old resident of Buffalo, New York, entered not guilty pleas before a Buffalo City Court judge and bail was set at \$20,000, the Attorney General's office said in a statement.

"We believe Carmack is one of the largest (spammers) and believe there are a significant number of them," Spitzer said in a conference call. "Spammers who forge documentation and steal identities of others to create their e-mail traffic will be prosecuted."

Spam, or unwanted e-mail hawking everything from herbal sexual stimulants

to mortgages, has become a growing issue as it now comprises as much as 75 percent of online messages.

About two-thirds of the spam that jams up in-boxes contains deceptive information such as false return addresses or pitches for miracle cures and work-at-home schemes, according to a recent analysis by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission.

The Attorney General's office said in a statement its Internet bureau receives more complaints about spam than about any other Internet-related issue.

"Spam itself is not - of itself - a crime," Spitzer said. "What makes this criminal conduct is the intersection of spamming with forgery and identity theft."

Carmack was charged with: stealing the identity of two residents to open Internet access accounts with EarthLink Inc. ; falsifying the business records of EarthLink; forging the headers of e-mail sent from the EarthLink accounts; and possessing a software program designed to create the forged e-mails, the Attorney General's office said in a statement.

Spitzer said his office worked with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and EarthLink, the nation's No. 3 Internet service provider. Last week EarthLink won a \$16 million settlement and injunctive relief against Carmack in U.S. district court in Atlanta after a year-long investigation.

"He cost EarthLink more than \$1 million," Spitzer charged. "And he opened in excess of 343 e-mail accounts using stolen identities."

The prosecution is the first by Spitzer under New York's identity theft statute, which was enacted in November.

Carmack's public defender was not immediately available for comment. The next court date is May 19.

Spitzer said more arrests in this case are not expected at the moment, but the investigation continues as Carmack's computer has been seized. He said investigations into other spammers are underway but declined to comment further.

The arrest comes as Louisiana Republican Rep. Billy Tauzin plans to introduce an anti-spam bill this week that is expected to move quickly through Congress.

Nineteen States Sue Software Firm; Allege Web Scam

California and 18 other states on Thursday brought a consumer protection lawsuit against Alyon Technologies Inc. for allegedly running a scam that automatically connected peoples' computers to porn sites then charged steep fees to their phone bills.

California Attorney General Bill Lockyer in a statement said Alyon, a New Jersey-based software company, installed pop-up ads that automatically dialed expensive adult Web sites without consent.

He said the suit was brought after his office received dozens of complaints

from consumers who had received steep bills from porn sites they had never knowingly visited. The sites Alyon links to require no credit cards but charge \$4.99 per minute to a consumer's phone bill, according to the complaint.

The complaint also charges that Alyon engages in unfair business practices when attempting to collect payment from consumers.

The suit is asking Alyon to provide better instructions on how consumers can remove the automatic dialer software from their computers.

SCO Threatens To Sue All Commercial Linux Users

SCO on Wednesday threatened to sue commercial Linux users, charging that Linux is an "unauthorized derivative" of Unix.

The company also said it plans to suspend Linux sales, and focus on Unix and its Web services technology, SCOx, introduced in April.

"With this announcement, we are letting people know that Linux is an unauthorized derivative of our Unix system V source code. We need to let people know that legal liability will rest with the Linux users," said Chris Sontag, senior vice president and general manager of SCOsource, the company's intellectual property licensing and protection program.

SCO said it will continue to support existing SCO Linux and Caldera OpenLinux customers and hold them harmless from SCO intellectual property issues regarding SCO Linux and Caldera OpenLinux products.

SCO sued IBM in March, charging that IBM violated SCO's intellectual property by including Unix source code in Linux. The widely criticized lawsuit seeks more than \$1 billion in damages. IBM denied the claims.

While SCO didn't explicitly say it plans to sue Linux users, it dropped some broad hints.

In a letter it sent to 1,500 of the world's largest corporations, SCO said, "We believe that Linux infringes on our UNIX intellectual property and other rights. We intend to aggressively protect and enforce these rights. Consistent with this effort, on March 7, we initiated legal action against IBM for alleged unfair competition and breach of contract with respect to our UNIX rights."

The letter adds, "Similar to analogous efforts underway in the music industry, we are prepared to take all actions necessary to stop the ongoing violation of our intellectual property or other rights."

Bruce Perens, an open source consultant, scoffed at SCO's threat. He said Linux users have nothing to fear, and should continue using the operating system

"These last couple of press releases have followed a pattern. They have been written to FUD Linux," Perens said. He noted that earlier this month, SCO blamed unnamed open source supporters for a denial-of-service attack on the company's Web server, citing as evidence the fact that the attacks occurred soon after developments in the IBM lawsuit. "It just sounds like a lot of air to me," Perens said.

He noted that SCO's own distribution of Linux might hurt its chances in a lawsuit, since SCO released that code into open source. Any Unix code contained in SCO's Linux would also be part of the open source license, Perens said.

If identical code appears in both Linux and Unix, it's more likely to have made its way from Linux to Unix than vice-versa, if only because the source code for Linux is public while the source code for Unix is proprietary, Perens said. "We've had the best engineers working on Linux for three years now. I can't believe that SCO knew things about Itanium that Hewlett-Packard, that originated the Itanium architecture, didn't know," Perens said.

SCO has presented no evidence to support its claims, because it doesn't have any, Perens said.

Some observers have speculated that SCO is angling for a big settlement from IBM, perhaps even to be bought out by IBM. But Perens said that outcome is unlikely. "IBM has had a chance already, so why didn't they buy the company? One reason is that IBM is not afraid that they'll lose, so why buy SCO when you can grind them into the Utah dirt. Also, IBM does not want the message out that they can be blackmailed."

Perens predicted SCO will lose in court.

SCO's Sontag said that even if Unix code is in SCO's own Linux - which he did not say is the case - it would not invalidate SCO's claim. Some of Unix intellectual property may have found its way into SCO's own Linux, but if it was there it would have been placed there by "third parties who violated their contract and licenses," and "inadvertently distributed for a period of time" by SCO.

He added, "The issue is that SCO's intellectual property is in Linux, and that's where we have to stay focused."

SCO has kept its evidence in the case confidential until now, but will be willing to share the information under nonclosure agreements, Sontag said. "We have to be careful in terms of how we lay the evidence out. This is a legal proceeding," he said.

'Fizzer' Computer Virus Spreading Faster

A new and complex computer virus called "Fizzer" spread rapidly across the Internet on Monday, infecting computers across the world via e-mail and the file-swapping service Kazaa, computer security experts said.

Businesses in Asia were the first to report the attack, followed by reports of tens of thousands of infections in Europe, and experts were expecting more cases in North America.

"It first appeared last Thursday and started out rather slowly," said Vincent Gullotto, who heads up an anti-virus response Team at Network Associates Inc. in Beaverton, Oregon.

Fizzer was a complex virus that combined previously known tactics from other malicious viruses, Gullotto said.

There was no threat that Fizzer would cause widespread damage similar to the disruption caused by the "SQL Slammer" in January, which bogged down computer networks across the globe, Gullotto said.

Instead, Fizzer appears as an e-mail with an attention-grabbing subject line that is activated once a user opens an attached file.

From there, it infects the shared files folder for Kazaa, the popular program that lets users swap songs and files anonymously over the Internet.

That allows Fizzer to spread to other computers, finds information for other contacts in Microsoft Corp.'s Outlook e-mail program and mail itself to more people.

British-based virus detection firm MessageLabs recorded 17,765 cases in 24 hours to 11:30 a.m. EDT. "We've upgraded it to high-risk just for the fact that we've seen so many in the last day," said Mark Toshack, a virus analyst at MessageLabs.

The worm also has the capability to disable computer users' anti-virus and firewall software, but is otherwise not a threat to users' personal files. The biggest headache was the extra traffic it generated, bogging down corporate networks.

"It sends an e-mail message with varying format to all the addresses found in the Windows Address Book and Microsoft Outlook," Japanese security firm Trend Micro said.

The worm arrives as a file attachment with a .EXE, .PIF, .COM, or .SCR extension.

Other security software makers issued similar warnings through their Web sites, including U.S. firm Symantec Corp. and Finland's F-Secure.

Secrets of Internet Sales Tax

In recent months, a few large e-tailers, including Target.com and Walmart.com, started charging sales tax on purchases made through their sites. Although this event took place largely without fanfare, it marked a watershed moment in the history of online commerce.

If more e-businesses hop on the bandwagon in coming months, the trickle may become a trend. The timing certainly seems right: With many state governments facing record budget deficits, pressure to levy sales tax online is likely to increase.

The big question is whether or not e-tailers are ready for the legal labyrinth that awaits them. Just thinking about the Internet sales tax issue can be enough to bring on a migraine headache.

"It's a hugely complicated patchwork of different state, local and county taxes, and then there's the issue of use and excise taxes. I can't imagine changing overnight," Forrester research director Kate Delhagen told the E-Commerce Times. "There's no rhyme or reason, and it's only gotten more complicated."

How can e-businesses make sense of this mess? And are there any viable solutions to what Delhagen termed "a political hot potato"?

Paul Ritter, program manager for Internet business strategies at the Yankee Group, described the taxation of e-commerce sales as a quagmire that has been the source of debate and lobbying efforts for years. As such, the issue probably will not be settled anytime soon.

"There are many competing interests, with states, federal government agencies, retailers and pure-play e-tailers each having a different view," Ritter told the E-Commerce Times. "It is unlikely that substantive changes will occur in the near term that won't be the subject of appeal or consumer backlash."

Brian O'Shaughnessy, director of corporate communications at VeriSign, told the E-Commerce Times that it is an onerous task to make sure tax authorities obtain their appropriate dues from online businesses without risking that such fees will negatively impact the health of those businesses.

O'Shaughnessy, whose company processes approximately 25 percent of all transaction payments online, also noted that e-commerce sales are one of the few growing areas of the economy.

The U.S. federal government historically has defined the nexus of a company as the place where it maintains a physical presence. For example, if a company's headquarters were located in California, its nexus would be in California, and it would be required to collect sales tax there.

However, the nexus issue does not stop with headquarters. If the same company had stores or branch offices in other states, each of those states would be considered a nexus as well, with the same tax responsibilities applying to the company. If the company had a nationwide presence (as do national chains like Wal-Mart and Target), it would be responsible for collecting taxes in all states.

In a nutshell, Dick Anderson, supervisor of special projects in the sales and use tax department of the California State Board of Equalization, told the E-Commerce Times that a company's nexus determines its responsibility for charging sales tax in a given state.

Anderson added that the U.S. Supreme Court has issued several rulings pertaining to interstate and foreign commerce. In effect, these rulings have stated that companies cannot be forced to collect sales tax unless they have what is considered a sufficient nexus in a particular state.

According to O'Shaughnessy, however, determining what qualifies as a nexus can be an elusive exercise at a time when Web and other technologies are blurring borders between states - and even between countries.

He described a scenario in which an Illinois resident, using a California credit card based out of a New Jersey bank, purchases a tangible piece of personal property from a Florida company as he crosses that state's border on his Wi-Fi phone and then specifies that the item be shipped to his aunt in Massachusetts. Who should collect sales tax revenue in this scenario? The answer is clear as mud.

Issues like county and city sales taxes, let alone foreign duties, can further complicate an already convoluted scenario, O'Shaughnessy added.

"The algorithm to figure it out is so immense as to be an impossible task," he said, noting that a nationwide agreement is essential to solving this dilemma.

Many others seem to have reached a similar conclusion. Forrester's Delhagen noted that in the last couple of years, a coalition of nearly 40 state governors has been lobbying to simplify the Internet sales tax morass. Given all the variations between what percentage a state (or county or city) charges for sales tax and which items are taxable (for example, clothes are not taxed in Massachusetts, while Oregon has no sales tax whatsoever), the task is akin to "herding cats."

Delhagen explained that in order to simplify the tax code, states must agree to a few common numbers and then decide which categories of items will be taxed. Although an overnight solution is unlikely, she said she expects to see progress on this issue in the next decade.

"Anything with the word 'tax' in it causes blood pressures to rise because the assumption is that taxes will be raised," Delhagen said, "when in fact some consumers may actually benefit" from reform.

Snow, Evans Call for Continued Internet Tax Ban

U.S. Treasury Secretary John Snow and Commerce Secretary Don Evans urged Congress on Thursday to extend a ban on Internet-specific taxes that expires this November.

In a letter to Wisconsin Rep. James Sensenbrenner, chairman of the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee, the two senior Bush administration officials said that new taxes could slow adoption of high-speed Internet access.

"Government must not slow the roll-out or usage of Internet services by establishing administrative barriers or imposing new access taxes," Snow and Evans wrote.

A Judiciary subcommittee held a hearing on the issue in April, but has not yet voted on the bill.

The moratorium, first passed in 1998, prohibits "multiple and discriminatory" taxes on Internet access fees and online traffic. Congress extended the ban in 2001 but it expires this year.

The ban does not address online sales taxes, which are currently prohibited under a 1992 Supreme Court decision that forbids states from taxing catalog, telephone and other remote sales.

Cash-strapped states, "brick and mortar" retailers and other advocates of online sales taxes have sought to tie the two issues together, hoping to link the politically popular moratorium with the more controversial right to impose sales taxes on the Web.

Online retailers have resisted sales taxes, though some retailers such as Target Corp. that have both online and physical stores have voluntarily begun to collect taxes from Web sales.

Kid-Friendly Web Zone Will Be Online in September

Telecommunications company NeuStar Inc. said on Tuesday it plans in September to launch a "child-friendly" Internet zone free of violence, pornography and other adult material.

Privately held NeuStar said the ".kids.us" Internet domain will be open to U.S. residents and businesses on Sept. 4, while registered trademark holders will be able to reserve their marks during a special preregistration period from June 17 to Aug. 15.

Last fall Congress directed NeuStar to set up the domain after previous attempts to shield children from inappropriate material online failed to survive court challenges.

Web sites within the ".kids.us" domain will be screened to ensure that they do not carry foul language, pornography, graphic violence and other material inappropriate for children 13 and younger. Nor will these sites include certain interactive features, such as chat rooms and instant messaging, or links to Web sites outside the domain.

Parents looking to ensure that their children do not stumble on inappropriate material when surfing the Internet will be able to set up their browsers to view only Web sites within the ".kids.us" domain, said Melinda Clem, NeuStar's director of business development.

Those wishing to set up a ".kids.us" Web page must first submit it to a panel that will ensure that it complies with the guidelines, Clem said. She said NeuStar will use automatic software and human monitors to ensure that ".kids.us" Web sites stay age-appropriate.

NeuStar will charge domain-name sellers a wholesale rate of \$65 per year. Customers will pay somewhat more than that to reserve a ".kids.us" address, Clem said, along with a \$250 annual charge to cover the costs of the content review.

Domain-name sellers typically charge between \$10 and \$35 per year to reserve addresses in established domains with no content restrictions, such as ".com" and ".info."

Sony Unwraps New Vaio Notebook

Sony has taken the wraps off its summer line-up of personal computers for the Japan market and with it unveiled the first Vaio model in its new TR range.

The new machine, which will be available first in June in Japan, is not likely to disappoint Sony fans. Its widescreen display gives it a distinctive look and a long list of features and good networking support rounds off the machine, for which Sony says it is yet to decide on overseas launch plans.

The PCG-TR1 is based around Intel's recently launched Pentium M processor running at 900 MHz. The machine can accommodate between 256MB and 1GB of DDR266 (Double Data Rate 266) memory and it has a 30GB hard drive. There

is also a built-in CD-RW/DVD-ROM optical drive, which supports CD-R writing at 8X and CD-RW writing at 4X speed.

The display is a 10.6-inch widescreen TFT LCD with WXGA resolution (1,280 pixels by 768 pixels). Just above the display there is a small video camera. It can be used to snap pictures or works with Sony's bundled videoconferencing software although it has a relatively low resolution of 370,000 pixels, which means it can manage around VGA resolution (640 pixels by 480 pixels) quality.

To aid picture capture Sony has put a capture button to the right of the main display. It is one of four buttons placed next to the display; the others are volume up/down and a zoom button.

Three wireless networking standards are supported: IEEE802.11b, IEEE802.11a, and Bluetooth 1.1, in addition to the Fast Ethernet and ILink/IEEE1394 wired networking standards. Other connectors include two USB 2.0 ports, a PC Card slot, Memory Stick Pro slot, and a connector enabling the notebook to be used with an external monitor.

It weighs just over 3 pounds and measures 10.6 inches by 1.4 inches by 7.4 inches. Battery life for the standard pack is between 4.5 hours and 7 hours with the large battery pack providing enough power for between 7 hours and 10 hours, according to Sony.

Sony will put the PCG-TR1 on sale in Japan on June 7 for a price around \$1,970.

Microsoft Says 'iLoo' Internet Project a Hoax

Microsoft Corp. said a company news release that it was developing a portable toilet with Internet access, called an "iLoo," was a hoax perpetrated by its British division.

The April 30 release, issued by the company's MSN Internet division in the United Kingdom, said Microsoft was developing a portable toilet with a wireless keyboard and an extending height-adjustable plasma screen in front of the seat. The iLoo was to debut at festivals this summer in Britain.

"This iLoo release came out of the UK office and was not a Microsoft sanctioned communication and we apologize for any confusion or offense it may have caused," Microsoft spokeswoman Bridgitt Arnold said late Monday.

The fake release generated coverage by The Wall Street Journal, The Associated Press and Reuters.

The Associated Press received confirmation of the project from both Microsoft Corp.'s Waggener Edstrom public relations firm and London-based Red Consultancy, which handles such work for the software giant in England.

In an e-mail sent last week to The Associated Press, Red Consultancy's Ben Philipson wrote "MSN is really working on building a prototype for the Summer festivals, perhaps Glastonbury ... This is very much a 'toe in the water' experiment to gauge interest so we'll have to see how it goes, although judging from response so far it's really captured people's imagination!"

Malina Bragg, who helps with MSN's account for Waggener Edstrom, also verified last week that the project was true.

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